3t Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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in his house. Ploughing, however, is an exclusive privilege of men; and women are debarred from it as a social taboo. The penalty for breach of this custom consists in a fine and ceremonial purification by the tribe. If you question a Santal on the genesis of the institution, he will tell you the myth that in ancient times when a woman first took the plough, the cattle in the yoke went on straight ahead and she could not make them deviate either to the left or to the right according to her will, when lo and behold, out opened a mighty river from under the furrows to the consternation of everybody.

In conjugal life, the women like their other Indian sisters are self-sacrificing. She will, we have already seen, eat last of all after feeding other members of the family. We asked a woman point-blank, "Why don't you dine along with men? Have you no such right?" "Our rights are equal," she answered with a genial smile, "but we choose not to exercise it." The way, however, she exercises her equal rights impresses one so much that the old Sirdar of Muruda, Mayurbhanj, was definitely of opinion that the Santal women work more than their male partners.

The equality of status, the woman claimed for her, extends to the drinking cup as well; but a distinction was drawn by her paradoxically enough when she blurted out, "We drink like men but do

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men alone to taste those presented before the Abge Bongas.

Selection of Village Priest

We consider it appropriate at this stage to give the readers some idea as to how the priest, the human connecting link between the tribe and the gods, is selected. When the priest dies childless or resigns voluntarily, village elders assemble at the house of the Headman or the priest. Next, the six deities of holy grove are invoked by the men sitting on mats, each with a winnowing-fan and some sun-dried rice given by the priest, if he is resigning, or by the Headman, if the priest is dead. As usual some begin to shake their heads in a hypnotic trance and get possessed. These men in trance are asked as to who they are. They name themselves after the gods they stand for. Thereafter, they are questioned as to whom they are recommending for the post. They answer. But it is customary that Maran Buru will first propose a name, and the other actor-deities invariably second and support him.

We have said before that the priest gets rent-free lands, out of whose proceeds he can buy sacrificial fowls and other requirements of office. Should he commit any social wrong, he can be removed from office by the tribal assembly.

4; Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
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597 of the boy renounce him and declare him henceforth to belong to the new father; it is also declared that the boy shall have no right of inheritance in the property of his natural father. When all this has been done the adopting father fixes a date for the formal adoption of the boy. The villagers of that village on that day behave as at Janam Chhatiar (name-giving ceremony of the Santal child). They shave and drink handi (rice beer). The usual procedure in a Janam Chhatiar is that the officiating midwife tells the assembled people the name of the new-born child; here she does not tell the name of the boy but the sept or sub-sept of the adopting father; henceforth that becomes the sept of the boy. Thereupon they leave the boy to eat the flesh of animals sacrificed to the tribal deities. Henceforward the boy becomes their own.

684 627 **Bitlaha**: It means to outcast a Santal from society. This outcasting takes place by the order of the assembled members of the Panchayat. It is resorted to when a Santal woman indulges in sexual intercourse with either a diku (non-Santal) or with a person of the same sept. If any one commits such an offence the headman of the village in question calls his neighbouring colleagues together and informs them of the matter; if the people hold that the case is not proven, then those who started the rumour are severely punished. If it is proved, the assembly gives an order for outcasting and they proceed to carry it out the day after the annual hunt. The date of this Bitlaha is announced by a man in the market who carries a branch of a Sal tree (Shorea robusta) with leaves. The people in the market on seeing him understand the matter and count the leaves

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622 [796] [174] man, together with that of all the other officials, was renewed annually, but there is little reality in it at the present day and the post is held for life. He is the spokesman of the villagers in all matters affecting their temporal welfare. In the original settlements it was usual for two or three brothers to start the new village together. The eldest brother assumed the leading position, and all the lands cleared or claimed for the future were in his gift. The cultivable land was divided equally after some portions had been reserved for the officials in recognition of the services they would be called on to perform for the benefit of the community, and the headman received the biggest share of the reserved land. As the village grew, others came to settle. Some became the tenants of the headman, fleeing from the oppression of landlords elsewhere. Others came into the village by marrying daughters of the first settlers. So it comes about that the family of the headman is the most substantial in the village. During the course of years, however, even the headman has in the majority of cases lost his original rights to a non-Santal landlord and has himself become an under-tenant, in spite of which his family has maintained its favourable position in relation to the rest of the villagers. In some cases he has also been able to acquire the rights of other tenants who have defaulted for one reason or another in paying rent.

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622 [434] [689] [224] [585] In addition to land, the headman receives other payments which he can use for his own benefit. Thus, when an offender against tribal custom is fined the headman receives a fourth of the total amount. During the spring hunts he receives a part of the flesh of every animal slain by a man from his own village. During the marriage ceremonies he occupies an important position throughout, and when a new bride is coming to his village her father has to pay a rupee to him before the party sets out from her home. At all times he is treated with great respect, especially by the younger members of the community. A marriage party always pays its respects first at his house, and at festivals, when the young men go dancing through the village street, they start outside the headman's house.

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In all matters involving the members of more than one village he is the acknowledged representative of his own people, whether it be the making of arrangements for a marriage or the fixing of dates for festivals and for hunts. In the settling of disputes he acquires considerable experience, being the chairman of the council in his own village and meeting with the headmen of other villages when the hunt council sits. Enjoying a position

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over a wide field, involving inheritance, marriages and instances of indiscipline. Members are allowed to appeal against decisions made in village councils. Punishments inflicted range from outcasting to fines, and crude punishments are sometimes exacted on the spot, as in a case of a youth who had transgressed the rules of behaviour towards a woman relative with whom he was not in a joking relationship. He was compelled to drag his nose along a line of urine provided by the village headman whose authority had been flouted. The hearing of cases continues till the small hours of the morning and the discussions appear interminable, with accusation and counter-accusation, the calling of witnesses and references to tribal law and custom. It is, however, one of the great educating and cementing institutions in the life of the tribe. It is known to them by the name of "high court", a name that has been naturalized in most Indian languages. It is also called the *sendra durup'*, the hunt sitting, and the *lo bir durup'*, the burnt forest sitting, the latter name being due to the fact that the hunt takes place when the undergrowth in the forest has been burnt to help the fertilizing of the soil.

Meanwhile, when the evening meal is over the young men gather in another part of the clearing and spend the night in revelry. There is much strong liquor in evidence. In some cases the place of meeting has become the site of a government liquor shop. The dances, of a class known as *doŋgeŗ*, are men's dances, and the songs, known as *bir*, or forest songs, are men's songs. They are frankly coarse and deal largely with the physical aspects of love, courtship and lust. Many of the songs that are sung on this night are never sung by the Santals in any mixed company, or, indeed, at any other time, a fact that indicates among them a standard of delicacy in sexual behaviour which certain modern schools of thought appear at times to deny to primitive people.

Towards morning some of the folk, young and old, rest for an hour or two of much-needed sleep, but when the sun has risen they take some breakfast and begin to disperse. They make their way to their own villages, hunting as they go; but on this second day the proceedings are apt to be unexciting, for they do not find much to kill. By late afternoon the men are home again with their spoils, and when these have been divided they work off their fatigue in sleep.

The supposed monotony of the struggle for a livelihood is broken by so many devices of nature and of man that it is